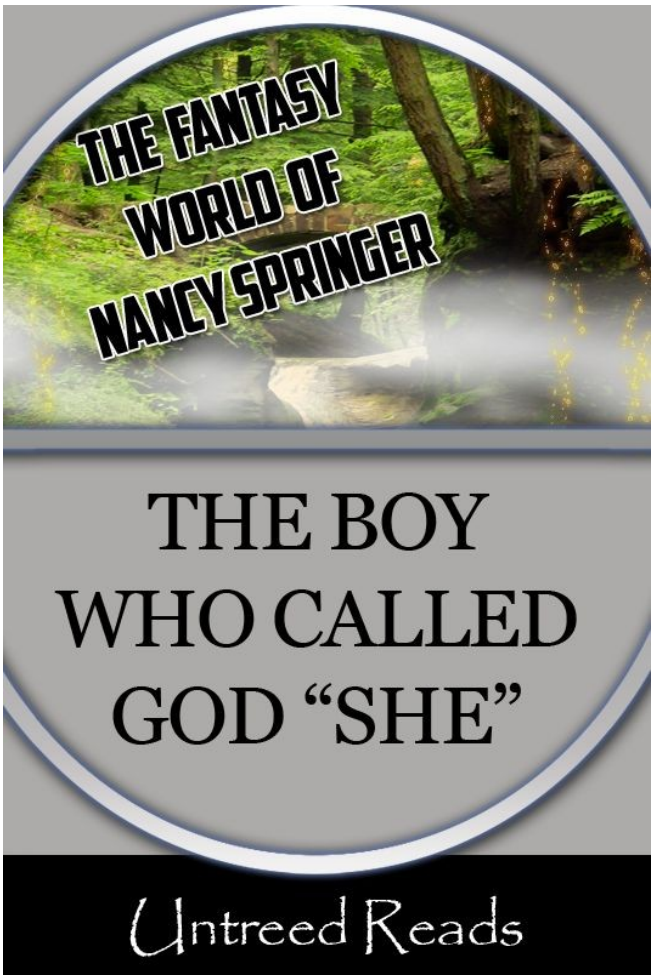
THE BOY WHO CALLED GOD "SHE"

Untreed Reads


THE FANTASY
WORLD OF
NANCY SPRINGER
THE BOY
WHO CALLED
GOD "SHE"
Untreed Reads

The Boy Who Called God "She"
By Nancy Springer

Copyright 2012 by Nancy Springer
Cover Copyright 2012 by Ginny Glass and Untreed Reads Publishing
The author is hereby established as the sole holder of the copyright. Either the publisher (Untreed Reads) or author may enforce copyrights to the fullest extent.

Previously published in print, 2000.

This ebook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This ebook may not be resold, reproduced or transmitted by any means in any form or given away to other people without specific permission from the author and/or publisher. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each person you share it with. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then please return to your ebook retailer and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

This is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to the living or dead is entirely coincidental.

Also by Nancy Springer and Untreed Reads Publishing
The Fantasy World of Nancy Springer: Dreamfisher
The Fantasy World of Nancy Springer: The Boy Who Plaited Manes
The Fantasy World of Nancy Springer: The Scent of an Angel

http://www.untreedreads.com

The Boy Who Called God “She”

Nancy Springer

So there’s this new kid in school, see? One of my suckups, little freshman punk, saw him go in the office and let me know. So me ’n Brent take a stroll to peep him out, because the two of us basically run the school, I mean the important stuff, like who gets to yank lunch money and jump line and go in the bathroom whenever they want.

“Loser,” Brent says to me out of the side of his mouth.

“Geek,” I agree, because the new kid is skinny and dorky looking with a softie face and purple fruity-ass hair, thinks he’s hot snot but he’s not. Like, he is actually dressed to code. This is a Christian school and boys are supposed to wear dark slacks and a button front shirt and a tie. My parents send me here because they say it will teach me a sense of order and discipline. Yeah, right. My parents don’t go to church or anything but they think Jesus is good for kids, kind of like Santa Claus. Like, they sent me to Sunday School when I was little. What I mostly learned was that I gotta be good or I go to Hell. So I figure I’m gonna go to Hell, because I am definitely not good and I like to beat up on geeks, and it looks like God just sent me another one.

Just as I’m thinking this, buttface Mrs. Miller clops up in those horseshoes of hers. “Put your tie on, Derek,” she snarfs at me.

“It is on.” Tied around my head.

“Put it on properly.”

Stupid old hippie, doesn’t she know a proper headband when she sees one? “But Mrs. Miller, it’s keeping my hair orderly and disciplined.”

She isn’t buying it. No damn sense of humor. I take the tie off my head and duck into the bathroom like I need a mirror or something and stick the tie in my back pocket. Then me ’n Brent have a smoke. Then we hang out. By third period we get bored and go to class. I pull my shirt tails half out of my pants to give the teachers something else to bother me about.

Third period is Religion class—like all the classes ain’t religion? I mean, in this school we got Jesus algebra, for Christ’s sake. But anyway, the new kid, I mean candy-ass, is there. It turns out his name is Julian,

which doesn't make me like him any better. I dump my butt in a seat in the back of the room and stare at Julian's skinny neck and his purple grape-jelly hair without thinking much about him or listening much to anything until up goes his hand and he says it.

"I don't think God means for us to be scared of Her," he says.

Her??

That bumps me up straight. I'm staring at this weird kid. Everybody is staring. Including the teacher. He can't seem to think what to say. There is this awesomely total silence, like a white hole of no noise at all.

Finally the teacher—Reverend Weltzer, he's a preacher at some church on Sundays—finally he says like each word is an egg that might break and make a slimy mess, "You refer to God as 'Her,' Julian?"

And that geek Julian says "Yes" with kind of a question mark on it, like, isn't that okay?

Weltzer says, "May I ask why?"

"I, uh, I just do." The fruithead doesn't sound real sure of himself.

"But our Lord Jesus was male," Weltzer says. "And he referred to God as his Father."

"Because it made God easy for him to talk to!" Julian lights up, dorky happy.

"I, um, I suppose so…" Now Weltzer isn't sure.

Julian says, "See, that's it. For me God's easy to talk to if She's a Her."

Just listening to him I want to crawl under the chair. Embarrassed to be human. I mean, what an unbelievable loser.

Reverend Weltzer thinks so too. I can see it in his face. He goes on talking about obedience or whatever and doesn't call on Julian anymore.

After class I pass Julian in the hall and knock him good with my shoulder. Brent lays in right behind me and goes, "Ew, a bug!" and whacks him hard on his fruit-loop head.

"Hey!" the dork yells at both of us, but we just laugh and keep walking.

At home I have to eat dinner with my parents and just for something to say besides pass the beans I tell them, “There’s this new kid in my school who calls God She.”

Mom and Dad both look at me like I just flashed them.

“She,” I say it again for them. “Her. God. Like, the big mama in the sky.”

“Is this girl some sort of radical feminist, Derek?” my dad wants to know.

“Girl? What girl?”

“It’s a *boy* doing this?” Mom goes, all shocked.

“No duh, Mom.” Like, how many other genders are there? Don’t answer that.

She ignores the sarcasm. “He must be some kind of sissy.”

Dad says, “I hope Reverend Weltzer told him to put a cork in it.”

I just shrug. I don’t want to agree with my mom or my dad even though I kind of do agree.

I don’t have to say anything because somebody knocks at the door. It’s Brent. I go out on the sidewalk with him and have a smoke. Me ’n Brent talk about some stuff and then he says, “What about that nerd Julian? How can any human being get that stupid?”

Actually, I can’t believe anyone *can* be that stupid. “You think maybe he’s tugging on Weltzer’s chain?” If he was, I wish I’d thought of it first.

“Nah. He’s as serious as a heart attack, man.”

“So what’s his problem?”

“I don’t know. Weltzer should tell him to stuff it where the sun don’t shine.”

The next day me ’n Brent see Julian in the lobby before school. He has his hair in a Statue of Liberty with each spike a different color. Brent shoves him up against a pillar and I grab his book bag and dump his papers and stuff all over the floor. This time he doesn’t even say Hey. He just looks at us. See, he’s not so stupid. He’s learning.

He doesn’t seem to be learning real fast in Religion, though. Weltzer starts class with about sixteen reasons from the Bible why God is a He, and up goes Julian’s hand. “But that was back *then*,” he says.

Weltzer says, all preacherish and really getting into it, “But Jesus is still here for us today! Christ arose from the dead. He—”

“God’s alive, right?”

“Yes! Exactly!”

“So when you’re alive, you grow, you change? Like it was Yahweh in the Old Testament and in the New Testament it’s Jesus and everything’s changed?”

Weltzer starts to turn colors. It’s interesting. His nose gets white and same around the mouth and eyes but the rest of his face gets pink like those Styrofoam tomatoes they slice for sandwiches in the cafeteria. He says between his teeth, “But then Jesus said his ministry was conclusive. He said, I am the Way—”

“But if God is alive, She can change Her mind anytime She wants, can’t She?”

Girls are giggling, Brent is laughing out loud, and me, I’m snickering but I’m listening to every word. I’ve never paid so much attention in class before.

Weltzer says edgy like a knife, “Julian, it is not consistent with Christian tradition to refer to our Lord by a female pronoun.”

“But what if She’s tired of being locked in the Bible?”

“Julian—”

Julian says, real soft, “You don’t want to listen. When I talk to Her, She listens.”

The whole class bursts out laughing and I’m watching Julian and I see his neck get red. Weltzer gets red too, pissed off, like we’re laughing at him. He barks, “In this school we refer to the deity as He.”

That loser Julian just doesn’t know when to give up. He says, “But if She’s alive… I mean, I’m alive, so I change. Like, I changed my hair today. What if She—”

Weltzer tells him, “Julian, report to the office.”

“Huh? Why?”

“Your hair is in violation of the dress code. Go.”

That’s a crock. Weltzer just doesn’t want to argue anymore about God being a guy. He’s probably expecting an argument about the hair, but this is weird, Julian doesn’t say a thing. He just gets up and walks out looking like he’s been hit, and that’s weird too, because he didn’t look that way when Brent was threatening his life. Dumb fruit-for-hair. Hell, who cares about getting sent to the office? If it was Brent or me, we would strut out. Three times and you get paddled, so what? They gotta do better than that to make me orderly and disciplined. I see Julian in the hall before lunch. His hair is wet and slicked down on his head. So I give him a shove. “Hey, rat face, you need a crying towel?”

He just looks at me, and all of a sudden I notice his eyes, sky gray, so calm and deep they’re freaky.

Brent comes up and whacks him on the back of the head and starts to say—

I don’t know what. Because Julian spins around and shoves Brent so hard he slams him against the lockers. And before I can blink he grabs me like no damn problem and slams me alongside of Brent. Knocks the breath out of me. Next thing I know he has a hand under my chin and slides me up the locker slick as an elevator. Brent too. He lifts both of us right off our feet.

The whole hallway is dead white-hole silent, nobody moving, everybody watching. I can hear my heart pounding and I’m trying to breathe and I can’t even think to use my hands, I’m just hoping Julian will let me down soon now please.

He says, very quiet, almost sweet, “Leave—me—alone.” Then he lets go. Me ’n Brent drop to our feet.

We stand there rubbing the red spots under our jawbones and watching Julian stalk off toward the cafeteria with everybody getting out of his way.

Here comes my freshman punk suckup. “I hear he’s a swimmer,” he says. “You got to watch them. They’re skinny but they’re really strong.”

“Yeah, I hear he’s training for the Olympics,” says another ass kisser.

“I hear he bench presses 200.”

Brent says, “Shut up.” His voice comes out squeaky but they zip it and back away.

Brent looks at me. I look at Brent. “This calls for revenge,” Brent says.

I don’t say anything. My voice box feels sorta numb.

At supper, Mom asks me, “Is that new boy still making trouble at your school?”

“Huh?” I get kind of slow when I don’t want to talk.

“The sissy boy. The one who says God is a woman.”

“Oh.” Julian. “He’s not a ‘sissy boy.’” God, my mother is so out of it.

“He’s not?”

“No.” A maniac, maybe, a nut case, riding the short bus. Freaky as hell. But definitely not a wimp or a geek either. So much for sizing up new kids.

The next day Weltzer sends Julian to the office again. Says his tie violates the dress code. It’s a hand-painted tie with a picture of a woman in a white gown sitting on a throne in the middle of an oval of golden stars. Weltzer says it’s from the Tarot and it’s Satanic. I am sitting right there with my shirt hanging out and no tie on and he doesn’t send me to the damn office.

Weltzer is a major crock.

I see Julian in the hall around lunchtime but I let him alone. So does Brent.

Me ’n Brent been buddies practically since kindergarten but that day we don’t have a whole lot to say to each other. We walk out slow after school. Neither of us can think of anything fun to do.

Until I see Weltzer’s car. There it sits at the far end of the parking lot, a gray Ford Escort with a Jesus fish window sticker and You’ve Got A Friend In JESUS Pennsylvania on the front license plate and some bumper stickers on the back—Don’t Drive Faster Than Your Angel Can Fly, that sort of thing. Me ’n Brent walk past it and I say, “Whoa.” Weltzer has a bright new bumper sticker:

GOD IS NOT POLITICALLY
CORRECT, BUT HE’S RIGHT

Big black letters. The minute I see it—I can’t explain what makes the thought fly into my head—but I just have to do it. It’s gonna make him so pissed.

“Gimme a black marker, Brent!”

“Huh?”

“A black marker! In your book bag, dork! Give it!”

I’m not worried about somebody seeing me, what with all the cars roaring past between me and school. Anyhow, it only takes a minute. A quick curved line, an *S*:

GOD IS NOT POLITICALLY
CORRECT, BUT **S**HE’S RIGHT

“You been around Julian too much,” is all Brent says.

I don’t say a thing; I just grin. See, I’m bad.

But get this: I’m so big and bad, I never once think to figure that Julian will get blamed.

First thing next day, about half a minute into homeroom period, Weltzer’s voice blares over the intercom, yelling for Julian to report to the office.

Not like me ’n Brent are in homeroom. We are hanging out in our private office, by the urinals. But there’s a speaker in the bathroom too. We hear it. And at the same time we both get it, what is happening. I look at Brent and he looks at me.

He goes all round-eyed. “Perfect!” he whispers.

I don’t say anything.

“Derek, my man…” He whacks me on the back. “The perfect revenge.”

I don’t say anything.

“Paddle central, here comes Julian!”

I don’t say anything. I look at Brent, my buddy. Since kindergarten, or first grade anyway. Both of us in this so-called Christian school because

our parents hope it will straighten us out.

I head toward the door.

“Hey man, where you going?”

I don’t answer. I just go charging out.

I run mach 100 down the empty hallway and skid into the office just in time. Weltzer is yanking Julian toward the back room, the principal is waiting in the doorway, and Julian—I mean, I never met anybody with more guts, the way he stuck up for his She-God, but he doesn’t need this. He isn’t fighting Weltzer, but Weltzer is giving him the rough hand anyway, and Julian just looks sick.

“It was me!” I yell, barging in.

Weltzer swings around with his head jutting out like he’s a ticked-off bear. He gives me the glare, his face like he has hives, he is so pumped full of high blood pressure and preacher wrath. “What do you—” he starts to yell at me.

But I yell at him instead. “It was me put the damn *S* on your asshole bumper sticker!”

Well, that does it. I mean, how would I know what it was all about if I didn’t do it? They have to let Julian go. I am the one who gets to experience the joy of the back room.

But while I’m in there I have a talk with the principal. Me and the principal kind of understand each other in a weird way, he is so used to hitting me. He’s seen me bullshit him so much he knows this time something’s different. I tell him what’s been happening with Weltzer and Julian, and he listens.

After I’m finished he thinks about it a couple minutes.

“Vandalism was not the right way to handle it,” he says finally.

“I wasn’t trying to handle anything!”

“Well…you’re trying to handle it now, aren’t you, Derek?”

Give me a break. “Just paddle me and let me go.”

“Paddle a rescuing hero? I don’t think so. You try to stay out of trouble now, you hear?”

I can’t believe it. But no problem, the principal gives me a pass back to class. I can tell by his face he’s still thinking about what I said, and I know he can’t say so, but I think he’s going to have a little talk with Weltzer. Maybe Julian won’t get sent to the office again just for saying what he believes.

Guess what. Julian is supposed to be in class but he’s a bad boy out in the hall, waiting for me around the first corner. He reaches out a hand to stop me. “Thanks,” he says, his voice almost a whisper.

I growl, “Thanks for what?”

“What you did…”

“I didn’t do anything but act stupid.”

“But I—you—”

I don’t want him trying to thank me. Anyway, it’s all kind of his fault. I burst out, “Why do you call God She, anyway?”

“Why not?”

“But do you believe it?”

He shrugs.

“You think God’s got *boobs*?”

“You think She’s got a wanker?”

I can’t deal with this. I don’t know what to think anymore. I say, almost begging him, “You’re just doing it to yank Weltzer’s chain, right?”

He shakes his head. “No.”

“Then *why*?”

He smiles at me. And his sky-gray eyes are quiet and happy and really freaky under that purple hair, like he’s a crazy angel. He smiles, the bell rings, he walks away.

Next day Weltzer sort of apologizes to the whole Religion class for being a turd, except that’s not what he calls it, but Julian is not there. Julian is not in school the next day, either, or the next.

I haven’t seen him since.

I keep looking for him at malls and stuff, but I haven’t seen him. I don’t know what happened to him. Maybe his parents yanked him out of that school. Maybe he ran off. Maybe he’s training with the Olympic swim team. Maybe he went back to wherever he came from.

It’s been a couple years now, actually, and I’m still thinking about him.

Weird, huh? But the thing is, I really want to talk with him. Like, is his God a mother to him, or more like a sister, or kind of a girlfriend? How does he talk with Her? Like a buddy, like me ’n Brent used to talk? Or better than that?

I haven’t been to church since I was a little kid, but I’m kinda thinking about going back. I mean, if I can’t talk with Julian, could I maybe talk with God? Would God listen? Like Julian said, could it be God is alive and things might change? Could it be God doesn’t want me to be scared of Her?

Edgar Award–winning author Nancy Springer,
well known for her science fiction, fantasy, and young adult novels,
has written a gripping psychological thriller—smart, chilling, and unrelenting…

DARK LIE

available in paperback and e-book in November 2012
from New American Library

Dorrie and Sam White are not the ordinary Midwestern couple they seem. For plain, hard-working Sam hides a deep passion for his wife. And Dorrie is secretly following the sixteen-year-old daughter, Juliet, she gave up for adoption long ago. Then one day at the mall, Dorrie watches horror-stricken as Juliet is forced into a van that drives away. Instinctively, Dorrie sends her own car speeding after it —an act of reckless courage that puts her on a collision course with a depraved killer…and draws Sam into a desperate search to save his wife. And as mother and daughter unite in a terrifying struggle to survive, Dorrie must confront her own dark, tormented past.

“A darkly riveting read...compelling.”
—Wendy Corsi Staub, national bestselling author *of Nightwatcher* and *Sleepwalker*

*“**A fast-paced, edge-of-your-seat thriller that will have you reading late into the night and cheering for the novel's unlikely but steadfast heroine.”***
—Heather Gudenkauf, *New York Time*s best-selling author of *The Weight of Silence* and *These Things Hidden*

Learn more about all of Nancy’s titles at her website,
www.nancyspringer.com.